ASH'ARĪ, AL- (AH 260–324/874–935 CE), more fully Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl ibn Abī Bishr Isḥāq; Muslim theologian and founder of the tradition of Muslim theology known as Ash'arīyah. He is commonly referred to by his followers as the Master, Abū al-Ḥasan, and he is sometimes referred to by his opponents as Ibn Abī Bishr.

Life and Works. Very little is known concerning al-Ash'arī's life. He was for some time an adherent of the Mu'tazilī school and a disciple of al-Jubbā'ī (d. 915), but at some point, probably prior to 909, he rejected the teachings of the Mu'tazilah in favor of the more conservative dogma of the traditionalists *(ahl al-ḥadīth).* He renounced the Mu'tazilah publicly during the Friday prayer service in the congregational mosque of Basra and thereafter wrote extensively against the doctrines of his erstwhile fellows and in defense of his new position, for which he had become quite well known by 912/3. Sometime later he moved to Baghdad, where he remained until the end of his life.

Some hundred works are attributed to al-Ash'arī in the medieval sources (see McCarthy, 1953, pp. 211–230), of which no more than the following six seem to have survived.

1. *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn* (Theological Opinions of the Muslims) is a lengthy work setting forth the diverse opinions of Muslim religious thinkers; its two separate (and largely repetitious) parts likely represent two originally distinct works, the first of which may have been substantially complete prior to al-Ash'arī's conversion.

2. His *Risālah ilā ahl al-thaghr bi-Bāb al-Abwāb* (Epistle to the People of the Frontier at Bāb al-Abwāb [Darband]) is a brief compendium of his teachings, composed shortly after his conversion.

3. *Al-luma'* (The Concise Remarks) is a short, general compendium or *summa* that was evidently the most popular, if not the most important, of al-Ash'arī's theological writings; commentaries were written on the

Luma' by al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) and Ibn Fūrak (d. 1015) and a refutation of it, *Naqd al-Luma'* (Critique of the *Concise Remarks*), by the Mu'tazilī *qāḍī* ("judge") 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī (d. 1024). The evidence of direct citations of the *Luma'* made by al-Ash'arī's followers seems to indicate that there were originally two recensions of the work, of which the one available at present is the shorter.

4. *Al-īmān* (Belief) is a short work on the nature of belief.

5. *Al-ibānah 'an uṣūl al-diyānah* (The Clear Statement on the Fundamental Elements of the Faith) is a polemical and apologetic exposition of basic dogma, ostensibly written against the Mu'tazilah and the followers of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 745), but its formally traditionalist style suggests that this work was composed as a kind of apology to justify al-Ash'arī's own orthodoxy after the Ḥanābilah refused to recognize him as an adherent of traditionalist doctrine.

6. *Al-ḥathth 'alā al-baḥth* (The Exhortation to Investigation) is a polemical apology for the use of speculative reasoning and formal terminology in theological discussion directed against the radical traditionalists. Most likely composed later than the *Ibānah,* this work has been published several times under the title *Istiḥsān al-khawḍ fī 'ilm al-kalām* (The Vindication of the Science of *Kalām*), but the correct title, given in Ibn 'Asākir's and Ibn Farḥūn's lists of al-Ash'arī's writings, appears in a recently discovered copy of the work.

A number of other works are quoted with some frequency by later followers of the school of al-Ash'arī, among them his commentary on the Qur'ān, perhaps originally composed before his conversion; *Al-mūjiz* (The Epitome); *Al-'amad fī al-ru'yah* (The Pillars concerning [God's] Visibility), a work on the visibility of God; *Īḍāḥ al-burhān* (The Clarification of Demonstration); and *Al-ajwibah al-miṣrīyah* (The Egyptian Responsa), as well as various *majālis* or *amālī,* notes or minutes taken from his lectures.

Though it is clear that al-Ash'arī converted from Mu'tazilī theology to a more conservative, "orthodox" doctrine that he himself identified with that of the traditionalists, the precise nature of this conversion and the character of his teaching have always been the subject of much debate. It is obvious that he changed his adherence from one basic set of dogmatic theses to another, shifting, for example, from the Mu'tazilī thesis that since God is altogether incorporeal he cannot be seen, to one that God is somehow visible and will be visibly manifest to the blessed in the next life. Yet al-Ash'arī's claim that he taught the doctrine of the traditionalists was vehemently rejected by the more conservative of them, particularly the Ḥanābilah, whose approbation and support he had expected to receive but who looked upon him as an unreconstructed rationalist. Hostility between the Ḥanābilah and the followers of al-Ash'arī continued unabated for many centuries, sometimes erupting into civil disturbances, and the polemic and counterpolemic of later supporters and opponents of Ash'arī doctrine tended to obscure the basic issues somewhat, as current attitudes were often projected backward onto the founder himself. Against Ḥanbalī accusations that al-Ash'arī had changed some of his views but not his basic attitude, some later apologists, most notably Ibn 'Asākir (d. 1176) and al-Subkī (d. 1370), depict al-Ash'arī as a wholehearted traditionalist. Most of those who taught or supported al-Ash'arī's doctrine, like the Shāfi'ī *qāḍī* and jurisconsult Abū al-Ma'ālī 'Azīzī ibn 'Abd al-Malik (d. 1100) in his apology against the Ḥanbalī extremists, held that al-Ash'arī taught a doctrine intermediate between the rationalizing theology of the Mu'tazilah and the anthropomorphizing fundamentalism of the radical traditionalists. It is this "middle way" that is witnessed in al-Ash'arī's own writings and in those of most of the theologians who held allegiance to his school. This is also the view of most modern scholars, although a few have tended to adopt one or the other of the more extreme views.

From the works available to us, two points are clear. First of all, not only did al-Ash'arī give up the characteristic dogmas of Mu'tazilī doctrine, but also, in taking the revelation (Qur'ān and *sunnah*) and the consensus of the Muslims as the primary foundations and criteria of basic dogma, he rejected the basic attitude of al-Jubbā'ī's school, namely that autonomous reason is the primary and, in most instances, the original and definitive source and judge of what is true in theology. Second, after his conversion, he continued to express, explain, and argue theological theses in the formal language of *kalām* theology in such a way as to give them logical coherence and a degree of conceptual clarity. The first stance set him at irreconcilable odds with his erstwhile fellows among the Mu'tazilah, while the second made him unacceptable to the radical traditionalists. It is thus that when he wrote the *Ibānah* to demonstrate his orthodoxy to the Ḥanābilah, al-Barbahārī (d. 941), one of the most widely respected Ḥanbalī teachers of the day, rejected the work out of hand because in it al-Ash'arī had not repudiated *kalām* reasoning, nor had he said anything incompatible with his own *kalām* analyses.

Basic Teachings. In its basic elements, the doctrine of al-Ash'arī is not wholly new. A beginning had been made several generations earlier toward the formation of a conservative, non-Mu'tazilī *kalām,* but its progress had been arrested in the aftermath of the *miḥnah* as a

result of the ascendancy of traditionalist anti-intellectualism during and immediately after the reign of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–861). Al-Ash'arī appropriated or adapted a number of elements from various earlier theologians. To a large extent his teaching follows and develops that of Ibn Kullāb (d. 855), who is regarded by later Ash'arī theologians as one of their own fellows *(aṣḥāb)*. Al-Ash'arī's theory of human action, however, is based on a distinction previously formulated by Ḍirār ibn 'Amr (d. 815) and al-Najjār (d. toward the middle of the ninth century), while some of his discussion of the divine names probably depends upon al-Jubbā'ī. His doctrine on the Qur'ān regarding the distinction between the recitation and the copy on the one hand and the text as the articulate meaning that is read and understood on the other, though based on Ibn Kullāb, is regarded as original by later authorities. While al-Ash'arī's teaching can be viewed on one level as a synthesis and adaptation of elements already present in one form or another but not hitherto assembled into a single system, it is nonetheless true that out of these elements he constructed a new, conceptually integrated whole of his own.

According to al-Ash'arī, the Qur'ān and the teaching of the Prophet present a reasoned exposition of the contingency of the world and its dependence upon the deliberate action of a transcendent creator, which, though not expressed in formal language, is complete and rationally probative. Thus, in contrast to the Mu'tazilah, he holds that theological inquiry is not originated autonomously by the mind but is provoked by the claims of a prophet, and that it is because of the rational validity of the prophet Muḥammad's basic teaching that one must accept the entire revelation, including those dogmas that cannot be inferred on purely rational grounds (for example, that God will be visible in the next life), and submit unconditionally to the divine law. Undertaking such theological inquiry is morally obligatory not for any psychological or intellectual reason, but because God has commanded it, and the command is known only in the revelation. With regard to the revelation itself, al-Ash'arī stands in significant contrast to his followers insofar as he does not employ in any of the works that are available to us the common *kalām* proof for the existence of God, the basic form of which is found in Chrysostom and other patristic writers, but, rather, prefers an argument based entirely and directly on the text of the Qur'ān.

In his discussion of the nature of God and of creatures, al-Ash'arī employs a formal method based on the Arab grammarians' analysis of predicative sentences. He holds that predications are divided into three categories: (1) those that assert the existence of only the subject itself *(al-nafs, nafs al-mawṣūf)*; (2) those that assert the existence of an "attribute" *(ṣifah, ma'nā)* distinct from the "self" of the subject as such; and (3) those that assert the existence of an action *(fi'l)* done by the subject. Since "knows" is not synonymous with "exists," the former must, when said of God, imply the existence of a cognition that is somehow distinct from his essential being *(al-nafs)*. Following a common tradition, al-Ash'arī holds that God has seven basic "essential attributes": the ability to act *(al-qudrah)*, cognition, volition, life, speech, sight, and hearing. Since "perdures" *(bāq)* is not synonymous with "exists," he adds to this list a distinct attribute of "perdurance" *(al-baqā')*. On the basis of the revelation al-Ash'arī also includes as eternal attributes God's hand(s) and face, which are neither understood anthropomorphically as bodily members nor reduced metaphorically to his self or to one of the seven basic eternal attributes. None of these attributes can be fully comprehended and explained by human understanding; each is distinct from the others and from God's "self," though it is true neither that they are identical with God's self nor that they are other than it.

Al-Ash'arī's view of creation is basically occasionalistic. Whatever exists and is not eternal, God creates, and its existence is his action. Among those events that take place in us, however, we distinguish those that we simply undergo from those that we do intentionally. The former are God's acts alone; the latter occur through an ability to act *(bi-qudrah)* created in us at the moment the act occurs and are formally referred to as *kasb* or *iktisāb* ("performance" or "doing"; these terms are commonly, but misleadingly, rendered by "acquisition"). What God wills, and only what he wills, comes to exist. Because he is subject to no rule his acts are just and ethically good as such. The objects of God's will are not coextensive with those of his command. The ethical values *(aḥkām)* of human actions are grounded unconditionally in God's command, license, and prohibition, and as God has already informed us, he will punish and/or reward us in the next life according to our obedience and disobedience in this life. There is no intrinsic relationship between men's actions and their status in the life to come; God does and will do what he wills, and what he wills is just by definition.

Method. Although al-Ash'arī did work out a comprehensive and coherent theology, he seems to have deliberately restricted the scope of his theological reasoning, which does not go much beyond the presentation of his fundamental theses in such a way that the propositions formally asserted are logically unambivalent on the basis of a rigid set of definitions and principles, and even these are not always explained and even less often argued in the texts. Rational arguments for individual

theses are set forth in their most elementary form, sometimes in the form of a Qur'ān citation and, again, on the basis of presuppositions that, even if stated, are not argued. Where argument is based on the authority of scripture, or where a citation of the Qur'ān alludes to and encapsulates a rational argument, the formal principles of the underlying exegesis are presumed known and accepted. Since countertheses and the arguments that support them are logically incompatible with the definitions and principles employed by al-Ash'arī, they are usually disposed of in a purely formal manner.

Al-Ash'arī's surviving dogmatic works are few and quite brief. For some questions, they can be supplemented by citations found in the works of his successors, but even though the later Ash'arī theologians had access to a large number of his writings, they are unable to state his position on a number of important issues. In some instances they do know Ibn Kullāb's teaching (for example, on whether or not God's essential attributes are denumerable), but sometimes the sources themselves explicitly recognize that what they offer as the teaching of al-Ash'arī is merely an inference or conjecture. It appears, then, that on a number of questions al-Ash'arī either refused to commit himself or had not carried his inquiry beyond an elementary level. His fundamental aim seems to have been simply to present the basic sense and truth of the primary Islamic dogmas so that they could be thematically possessed and appropriated in an unambiguous form and to distinguish them from heresy and unbelief in such a way that the error of the latter would be clearly understood and displayed.

Later Influence. How rapidly and how widely al-Ash'arī's theology was adopted by orthodox Muslims has been a matter of debate, as has the question of its ultimate significance in the religious and intellectual history of Sunnī Islam. Its early importance is witnessed by the treatment al-Ash'arī receives in Ibn al-Nadīm's bio-bibliographical encyclopedia, *Al-fihrist* (The Catalog), composed in 987–988, and in *Al-fiṣal fī al-milal* (Judgments on the Sects), a heresiographical work by the Ẓāhirī jurist and philosopher Ibn Ḥazm of Cordova (d. 1064). Certainly by the latter half of the eleventh century Ash'arī theology was upheld by the leading Shāfi'ī jurisconsults, and for the historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) it represents the mainstream of orthodox *kalām*. A number of Ṣūfīs, beginning already with several of the disciples of al-Ḥallāj (d. 922), were Ash'arī in systematic theology, employing *kalām* as a kind of conceptual, dogmatic foundation to their mystical thought, and others, such as al-Kalābādhī (d. 990), though not strictly Ash'arī in dogma, were influenced by Ash'arī teaching. Again, although the school of al-Māturīdī (d. 944) always maintained its theological distinctiveness, Ash'arī influence appears in some of their works. Similarly, the influence of Ash'arī language and concepts can be detected even in some later Ḥanbalī *'aqīdahs* (outlines of basic doctrine), and in at least one case, the *Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn* (The Foundation concerning the Basic Doctrines) of the Ḥanbalī *qāḍī* Abū Ya'lā al-Farrā' (d. 1066), several formulations are taken over directly from the theological writings of al-Bāqillānī, a leading Ash'arī theologian of the preceding generation.

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account of several major themes, chiefly causality and action, as presented in the writings of al-Ash'arī.

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ASH'ARĪYAH. The theological doctrine of the Ash'arīyah, the followers of al-Ash'arī, is commonly regarded as the most important single school of systematic theology in orthodox Islam. The school and its members are commonly referred to in Arabic as *al-ash'arīyah* and its members often as *al-ashā'irah* (the "Ash'arīs"). Ash'arī masters during the tenth and eleventh centuries CE most commonly refer to themselves and the school as *ahl al-ḥaqq* ("those who teach the true doctrine") or *ahl al-sunnah wa-al-jamā'ah* ("the adherents of the *sunnah* and the consensus [of the Muslim community]") and sometimes as *ahl al-taḥqīq* ("those whose doctrine is conceptually clear and verified"). It should be noted, however, that other groups, including some opponents of the Ash'arīyah, use the same expressions, and the first two in particular, to describe themselves. Ash'arīyah is not, as such, identified with any single juridical tradition *(madhhab);* most Ash'arī theologians were Shāfi'ī, and some were famous as teachers of Shāfi'ī law, but a large number of them were Mālikī, the most famous being the Mālikī *qāḍī* ("judge") al-Bāqillānī.

The history of the school can be divided into two clearly distinguishable periods, the division falling about the beginning of the twelfth century CE. The first period, often referred to as that of classical Ash'arī theology, is characterized by the formal language, analysis, and argumentation of the Basran *kalām* employed by al-Ash'arī himself, while the second is characterized by the language, concepts, and formal logic of philosophy *(falsafah),* that is, of the Islamic continuation of Greek philosophy. [*See* Falsafah.] The school received strong official support under the Seljuk vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092), with many of its masters appointed to chairs of the Shāfi'ī law in the colleges *(madrasahs)* that he founded. Many scholars identify the acme of the school with the great Ash'arī masters of this period. Many, most notably Georges C. Anawati and Louis Gardet, have seen the introduction and adaptation of Aristotelian logic and concepts as analogous to the *via nova* of Western Scholastic theology and accordingly hold that the Ash'arī thinking of the later period is more sophisticated and more truly theological than that of the earlier period.

Principal Figures. We have very few concrete data concerning the teaching of al-Ash'arī's immediate disciples. Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bāhilī, and Abū Sahl al-Ṣa'lūkī are regularly cited in the theological writings of later Ash'arī thinkers, but the only theological work by one of his direct disciples that is known to have survived is the *Ta'wīl al-āyāt al-mushkilah* (The Interpretation of Difficult Verses) of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī. In formulation and conception this work appears to follow the teaching of al-Ash'arī rigidly: the proof for the contingency of the world and the existence of God, for example, is not the one universally employed by the Ash'arīyah of succeeding generations, but depends directly on al-Ash'arī's *Al-luma'* (The Concise Remarks). The most important of al-Ash'arī's immediate disciples, however, was certainly al-Bāhilī; although al-Qaffāl's student al-Ḥalīmī (d. 1012) is cited with some frequency by later authorities, it is three students of al-Bāhilī who dominate Ash'arī thinking in the next two generations. These are the *qāḍī* Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak (d. 1015), and Abū Isḥāq al-Isfarā'īnī (d. 1027).

Several of al-Bāqillānī's theological writings have survived and are published: two compendia of moderate length, *Al-tamhīd* (The Introduction) and *Al-inṣāf* (The Equitable View), and a major work on the miraculous character of the Qur'ān, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (The Inimitability of the Qur'ān). Of his longest and most important work, *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn* (The Guidance of Those Who Seek to Be Guided Aright), however, only a part, yet unpublished, of the section on prophecy is presently known. A number of important works that are commonly cited appear not to have survived at all, among them a tract on the ontology of attributes and predicates entitled *Mā yu'allal wa-mā lā yu'allal* (What Is Founded in an *'Illah* and What Is Not) and *Al-naqḍ al-kabīr* (The Major Critique), which is perhaps a longer recension of his *Naqḍ Al-naqḍ* (The Critique of *The Critique*), a work written in response to the *Naqḍ Al-luma'* (The Critique of [al-Ash'arī's] *Al-luma'*) composed by the great Mu'tazilī master 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1024). Ibn Fūrak's *Bayān ta'wīl mushkil al-ḥadīth* (The Clear Interpretation of Difficult Traditions) was very popular in later times and survives in many copies, but among his dogmatic writings only a few short works, none of them published, are known to have survived. (The lengthy *Uṣūl al-dīn* [Basic Doctrines] contained in the Ayasofya collection of Istanbul and attributed to him in several European handbooks is by his grandson.) Of al-Isfarā'īnī's writings, only one short compendium *('aqīdah),* yet unpublished, is known to have survived, although a large number of theological works are cited by later Ash'arī writers, among them *Al-jāmi'* (The *Summa*), *Al-mukhtaṣar* (The Abridged Compendium), *Al-waṣf wa-al-ṣifah* (Predications and Attributes), and *Al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt* (The Names and Attributes [of God]).

Among the Ash'arīyah of succeeding generations, the

principal figures some of whose theological works are available and in part published are 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 1037), who studied with al-Isfarā'īnī; Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 1056), best known as a traditionist and jurisconsult; Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), a student of both Ibn Fūrak and al-Isfarā'īnī, renowned as a teacher and writer on Sufism; his student Abū Sa'd al-Mutawallī (d. 1086), best known as a jurisconsult, and Abū Bakr al-Fūrakī (d. 1094), a grandson of Ibn Fūrak and son-in-law of al-Qushayrī. We have none of the theological writings of Abū al-Qāsim al-Isfarā'īnī (d. 1060), though his commentary on the *Mukhtaṣar* of Abū Isḥāq al-Isfarā'īnī is often cited along with others of his works. His disciple Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 1085), known as Imām al-Ḥaramayn (Imam of the Holy Cities, that is, Mecca and Medina, to which he was forced to flee for a time), was not only one of the foremost Muslim theologians of any period but also the leading Shāfi'ī legist of his age.

A number of al-Juwaynī's dogmatic works have survived and are published, most important his *Irshād* (Guidance), the *Risālah al-niẓāmīyah* (The Short Tract for Niẓām [al-Mulk], twice published under the title *Al-'aqīdah al-niẓāmīyah*), and *Al-shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn* (The Complete Compendium of the Basic Doctrines), which is a very extensive exposition *(taḥrīr)* of al-Bāqillānī's commentary on al-Ash'arī's *Al-luma'*. A significant portion of *Al-shāmil* is preserved, and the substance of the remainder survives in an abridgement of some two hundred folios by an unknown author, entitled *Al-kāmil fī ikhtiṣār Al-shāmil* (The Perfect Abridgement of *Al-shāmil*). Although the second major period of Ash'arī theology, already foreshadowed in some of al-Juwaynī's work, is inaugurated by his most famous student, al-Ghazālī, several of his disciples continued to pursue *kalām* in the traditional form, and their surviving works are of great importance as sources for our understanding of the development of the school in the classical period. These are the *Uṣūl al-dīn* (Basic Doctrines) by al-Kiyā' al-Harāsī (d. 1110), a highly respected jurisconsult, and *Al-ghunyah fī al-kalām* (Sufficiency in *Kalām*) by Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 1118), of whose commentary on the *Irshād* of al-Juwaynī a significant fragment is also preserved.

Doctrines and Methods of the Classical Period. The school of al-Ash'arī universally holds that the sources of theological knowledge are, in order of priority, the Qur'ān, the *sunnah*, the consensus of the Muslim community, and human reason, and their basic teaching varies little from one master to another during the classical period. God's being is eternal *(qadīm)* and unconditioned; in his "self" *(nafs, dhāt)* and in his "essential attributes" *(ṣifāt al-nafs)*, his nonexistence is impossible. Every being other than God and his essential attributes exists as an action of his that is finite, corporeal, and temporal, and therefore altogether unlike him. Temporal beings are referred to as God's "attributes of action" *(ṣifāt af'ālihi)*, since it is they that are asserted to exist when any predicate of action such as "creates" or "sustains" is said of him.

Though questioning the denumerability of the "essential attributes" of God, the Ash'arīyah all recognize seven principal ones: life, cognition, volition, the ability to act, sight, hearing, and speaking. They hold these to be real *(thābitah)* and distinguishable, as what is asserted by "wills" is distinct from what is asserted by "knows," and so forth; they are neither simply identical with God's "self" nor are they other than it, since "other" implies separability and therefore contingency. The objects of his ability to create are infinite and are known to him as such. What he knows will be, he wills to be, and nothing comes to be that he does not will; whatever comes to be, comes to be through his ability to act when and as his will determines.

As God is one, so each of his essential attributes is one: he knows an infinity of objects in a single, eternal cognition and wills the existence of an indefinite number of beings in a single, eternal volition. Since he has neither needs nor desires, he cannot be said to act for a motive or reason. Neither his acts nor his commands can be rationalized; since he is the absolute Lord of creation, they are right and just *('adl)* simply because they are his, independently of any apparent good or harm they may constitute or cause with respect to any creature. [*See* Attributes of God, *article on* Islamic Concepts.]

God makes himself known to the believer in a special way in the Qur'ān, and one of the issues most vehemently contested between the Ash'arīyah and their opponents, both the Mu'tazilah and the Ḥanābilah, is the validity and sense of the thesis "the Qur'ān is the uncreated speech of God." According to the Ash'arī analysis, "speech" or "speaking" *(kalām)* refers to an interior intention that is materially signified and expressed by spoken, written, and remembered expressions *(ḥurūf)*. God's eternal attribute of speaking is one and undivided: it becomes differentiated into statements, commands, and so on in its material articulation in a particular language by means of which it is revealed and manifested. Thus the believer's recitation *(qirā'ah)* of the Qur'ān, like the written copy, is created, but what is recited *(maqrū')*, that is, the intention made present and understood, is the uncreated speaking of God.

The Qur'ān is miraculous not merely because it foretold and foretells future events, but in a unique way because of the sublimity of its rhetorical expression. Ac-

cording to the Ash'arīyah God is properly described only by those expressions "by which he has described himself," that is, those given in the Qur'ān and in the tradition. [*See* I'jāz *for further discussion.*] Although God's being is beyond the grasp of human intelligence, these predicates, known as "his most beautiful names" *(asmā'uhu al-ḥusnā)*, are known to be true and adequate. The Ash'arīyah analyze them systematically, first, in order to reduce them referentially to God's "self," to one of his essential attributes, or to one of his "attributes of action," and second, to examine their specific connotations. That God is in some real sense visible they hold to be rationally demonstrable; that he will be seen by the believers in the next life is known only by revelation.

Ontological bases of Ash'arī thought. According to the Ash'arī theologians of the classical period, the world consists of two kinds of primary entities: atoms, which are conjoined to form bodies, and the entitative "attributes" or "accidents" that reside in these atoms, each of which contains a single discrete instance of each class *(jins)* of accident or its contrary. The atoms perdure through many instants, but the "accidents," since they exist for only an instant, are continually created anew by God. Events are the coming to be of entities, and since God causes the existence of every entity, the causation of one event by another *(tawallud)* is denied. The system is thus fundamentally occasionalistic, and the interrelationships between distinct entities as they exist separately in temporal succession are little discussed as such in the available texts. [*See* Occasionalism.]

Events that are properly described as human actions *(aksāb)* are defined as those that are the immediate objects of a "created ability to act" *(qudrah muḥdathah)* and are limited to those events that take place in the agent as and insofar as they are intended by the agent. As entities they are ascribed to God, as his action; under other descriptions they qualify the part, and only the part, of the agent in which they occur and are so ascribed to him as his action. The human agent is properly said to be able to perform the act he performs only at the moment he actually performs it; only at this instant does God create in him the ability to perform it. On this basis the Ash'arī theologians are accused of holding that individuals are in some instances commanded by God to do what they are not able to do *(taklīf mā lā yuṭāq)*. Though this is formally true, appropriate distinctions are made between an agent's not being able to do something *(ghayr qādir)* and his being unable *('ājiz)* to do it, and accordingly between voluntary omission *(tark)* and involuntary omission. This analysis of human actions was radically opposed by the Mu'tazilah, who considered it to be deterministic. Viewed from the standpoint of the Ash'arī school, however, the issue is not one of freedom and determinism, but of whether or not any event can occur independently of God's will and action.

In fact, the question of determinism is treated ambivalently in most of the texts we have. Those events that occur regularly as the apparent consequences of human actions are not considered as true effects of the basic act, but are created by God occasionalistically according to the consistency of the "convention" *('ādah)* that he freely follows in ordering material events. Miracles are events that God has created with a radical departure from the sequence in which he usually makes things happen, in order to verify the divine origin of a prophet's message. Belief *(īmān)* is essentially the assent *(taṣdīq)* of the believer to the truth of God's message transmitted by the prophet, and one in whom this assent occurs is by definition a believer *(mu'min)*. The assent requires, but is distinct from, cognition and entails, but is distinct from, the performance of what God commands. God commands the belief of the unbeliever but does not will it (otherwise he would believe). The obedience of the believers is neither the cause nor the necessary condition of their reward in the life to come; it is simply a criterion arbitrarily decreed by God. [*See* Free Will and Predestination, *article on* Islamic Concept.]

Ash'arī methods. The Ash'arī school disapproves of *taqlīd*, the unreflecting assent to religious dogmas by simple acquiescence to recognized authority. They hold that, at least on a basic level, the believer ought to know the sense and coherence of what he holds to be true and should rationally understand the validity of its foundation in the Qur'ān and the teaching of the Prophet. According to the traditionalist method, creedal and theological statements are established and verified through the collection of a consistent body of citations from the Qur'ān, the Prophet, and recognized authorities among the first generations of Muslims, so that any deviant thesis can be excluded on grounds of contextual incompatibility with these canonical sources. By contrast, the Ash'arī method proceeds to a formal, logical, and conceptual analysis of the terms of each thesis on the basis of a rigid set of definitions and distinctions, axioms and principles, which both explain the elementary sense and foundation of the thesis and exclude any counterthesis as unfounded or inconsistent in some respect.

Among the most conspicuous aspects of the Ash'arī texts are the formalism that dominates both their expression and their intention and the narrow delimitation of topics as defined by the particular thesis. Since

the Ash'arīyah, unlike the Mu'tazilah, did not consider it necessary to found their theology autonomously on philosophical reasoning, the theoretical principles and implications of their doctrine are not extensively set forth in the texts. One begins from and always returns to the basic definitions and distinctions, which are presented and argued in what often appears to be a rather peremptory manner. Even where positions are argued at great length in terms of a variety of questions and against a number of counterpositions, as in al-Juwaynī's *Al-shāmil*, the discussion of the basic issue seldom advances much beyond its original statement. Consequently, and especially given the limited sources currently available, for a number of important questions it is extremely difficult to interpret what is explicitly presented within the broader implications of the question. For this reason, the Ash'arī *kalām* of the classical period has been considered chiefly a dialectic exercise and one that is mostly, if not entirely, apologetic in character. The formal disputation *(munāẓarah)* was from the outset a central element in the study and cultivation of the religious sciences in Islam, and as in the case of Western Scholasticism, it largely determined the literary expression of Muslim theology.

A number of leading Ash'arī theologians wrote works on dialectics *(jadal)*. Although the form of their presentation is often dialectical, few if any classical Ash'arī works are dialectically apologetic in the strict sense of the term, for both the question and the argument are always presented and elaborated within the narrow context of the formal and theoretical presuppositions of the school's own doctrine, not those presupposed by the counterthesis or any other that might presumably be acceptable to both disputants. Even so, their Muslim opponents, at first chiefly the Mu'tazilah and later the Karrāmīyah, had a significant catalytic effect on the development of Ash'arī theology in the classical period: they were not simply a source of countertheses that had to be dealt with, but were also significant figures within the religious and intellectual milieu, and as such were, along with the Ḥanābilah, competitors for the allegiance of the Muslim community and in some cases for patronage too.

Philosophical problems. It was apparently under pressure from the Mu'tazilī school of Basra, then approaching its zenith, that Ash'arī theology made rapid advances in sophistication toward the beginning of the eleventh century. Concepts that had remained somewhat vague or inadequately elaborated in the work of al-Ash'arī and his immediate disciples underwent revision and redefinition, while principles and constructs that had not been sufficiently thought through were redefined and the system as a whole brought into more rigorous coherence. In the process, a certain diversity of teaching became apparent in the works of the leading masters. The distinction between the necessarily existent (the eternal) and the contingent *(al-muḥdath*, the temporal) was fundamental.

Beyond this, most of the Ash'arī theologians of the classical period understood being univocally, to the extent that terms meaning "entity" *(shay', dhāt, mawjūd)* were applied to the atoms and their accidental properties alike. The Ash'arīyah of this period were basically nominalists. God determines the various kinds of beings, creating each with its distinctive characteristics; the names of the classes or kinds of things by which their individual instances are called are given originally in God's instruction *(tawqīf)*, not by human convention. The basic adjectival or descriptive terms that ascribe distinct or accidental properties to things are derived from the names of those properties, as *'ālim* (knows) is derived from *'ilm* (cognition) to describe a subject in which a cognition exists.

The question of what qualifications or predicates of a being are or are not grounded *(mu'allalah)* in distinct properties was the subject of considerable discussion. Because the foundation of the system lay in its analytic formalism, problems inevitably arose concerning the universality of many terms. These were especially acute since they held that terms that name both human and divine attributes (*life, cognition, volition*, for example) are basically univocal, while asserting at the same time that God and his eternal attributes are wholly unlike created beings and so belong to no class *(jins)* of entities: we know that these terms name God's attributes truly and adequately because they are used by God in the Qur'ān. Formulations to the effect that God's will, for example, "is a volition unlike volitions" stated but did not adequately resolve the problem.

Following a formula found already in al-Ash'arī, Ibn Fūrak and others held that things simply "deserve" *(istaḥaqqa)* to be called by the terms that describe them properly and truly. Any subject in which there exists a cognition, for example, "deserves" to be described by the expression *knows*, and the cognition is, in each case, the reason or cause of the predication *('illat al-waṣf)*; what they have in common *(jāmi')* is this cause or reason. What any two cognitions, on the other hand, have in common is simply that they deserve to be named by the expression *cognition*. Some authorities will speak of their having the same "particular characteristics" *(khawāṣṣ, khaṣā'iṣ)*. Al-Bāqillānī, however, adapting a concept from his Mu'tazilī contemporaries, posits the reality of non-entitative attributes or "states" *(aḥwāl)* of things, which are the referential or ontological basis of the universality of descriptive terms. In this

way, every cognition, whether created or uncreated (eternal), is qualified by a state of "being a cognition" *(ʿilmīyah)*, and every subject in which there exists a cognition is qualified by a state of "being cognizant" *(ʿālimīyah)*. Similarly a human action *(kasb)* is qualified by a state of being a human action *(kasbīyah)*. Among the Ashʿarī masters of the classical period, only al-Juwaynī accepted and defended al-Bāqillānī's concept of "states."

There were a number of other difficulties and differences among the Ashʿarī theologians of the period, though these are less clearly presented in the available sources. The school agreed, for example, that God is able to create an infinite number of individuals belonging to any given class of beings, but did not agree as to whether or not he is able to create an infinity of classes other than those he has actually created. The question of whether, and in what way, God's will is general or particular with regard to its objects was debated, but exactly how the problem was treated by the various authors remains unclear. Likewise, al-Juwaynī, and he alone, it would seem, held that God's knowledge of creatures is general and not particular, but again the available sources do not give us an adequate view of his thought on the question. Though the same basic distinctions are made with regard to the createdness of human actions, and the same set of basic propositions are formally maintained by all authorities, there are differences concerning the way the concrete relationships between the elements involved in human actions are understood. Some, among them al-Juwaynī, hold that the relationship between the created ability to act and its object is simply intentional. The antecedent or concomitant actuality of motivation and volition is seldom discussed in the available texts, since it is not formally pertinent, given the way the basic question of the createdness of human actions is posed and treated. The most conspicuous deviation from the normal form of the school's teaching in this period is found in al-Juwaynī's *Risālah* (or *ʿAqīdah*) dedicated to Niẓām al-Mulk. Although he maintains the basic theological dogmas of the school, the way in which they are presented and explained is new and, in the case of some major elements, irreconcilable not only with the teaching of his predecessors but also with that of his own major theological writings. In many respects the work anticipates the fundamental trend of the following period.

Later Ashʿarīyah. With the rapidly increasing assimilation of ancient and Hellenistic learning, both scientific and philosophical, and its integration into the intellectual life of Islam, the change in both language and conceptualization that characterizes the second major period of Ashʿarī theology was inevitable: the urgent need of Sunnī orthodoxy to counter the growing influence of Ismāʿīlī gnosticism and of the philosophers *(falāsifah)*, particularly the Neoplatonism of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), made it imperative. The three most creative theologians of this period were al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153), a student of Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209). The major Ashʿarī texts surviving from this period are more numerous and also more diverse than those of the earlier school, since many of them, especially those of al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī, enjoyed great popularity over the centuries, while the earlier works, rapidly outdated, became progressively more remote in concept and expression. The apologetic and polemic of the Ashʿarī theologians of this period engage their rationalistic opponents directly, not merely in their own language, but on purely rational grounds, as in al-Ghazālī's famous refutation of Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, *Tahāfut al-falāsifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), and in al-Shahrastānī's *Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifah* (Wrestling the Philosophers Down). Where the formal and theoretical principles of their doctrine were not much discussed in the texts of the classical period, they are now set forth in extensive detail.

The general attitudes of the three great masters of the period and the character of their thought manifest significant differences, however. Al-Ghazālī's view of the nature and value of formal, systematic theology, in particular, was not shared by other Ashʿarī thinkers either before or after him. In the wake of intellectual and religious crises, he became convinced that the only valid and certain knowledge of God is given in direct mystical experience. As a result, where the common Ashʿarī tradition held that systematic theology furnishes a sound and valuable, if not essential, conceptual foundation for one's belief, al-Ghazālī insists that it is wholly inadequate. Since it cannot be grounded in autonomous human reason, moreover, it is at best founded in *taqlīd* and, he concludes, has no valid function other than as a dialectical apologetic. He did, however, produce two *kalām* compendia in the traditional form, the *Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād* (The Just Mean in Belief) and the *Qawāʿid al-ʿaqāʾid* (Foundations of the Creeds, which is book 2 of the first part of his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* [The Vitalization of the Religious Sciences]). While these works by no means embody his entire theology, they are demonstrative of his dogmatic thought as it relates to the Ashʿarī tradition.

In these works, as in al-Shahrastānī's *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām* (The Furthermost Steps in the Science of *Kalām*), one sees not so much a sudden and radical break with the past as an effort to rethink and recast the basic dogmas within an expanded theoretical

framework, one that required and produced a definite, and ultimately definitive, movement away from the rigid kind of analysis and close restriction of topics that had characterized the school since its foundation. The traditional formulation of the basic dogmatic theses is thus consistently maintained, but the exposition and argumentation of most of them is in many respects new and often impressive.

Against what they regard as an impoverished conception of God's being held by the *falāsifah*, al-Ghazālī and al-Shahrastānī set forth an understanding of the traditional seven essential attributes that, in taking them more as aspects of God's "essence" than as distinct properties, is somewhat analogous to the position of the Mu'tazilī school of Basra. The relation between God's eternal power, knowledge, and will and their temporal objects is more thoroughly and explicitly explored than in earlier Ash'arī texts and in different, more Aristotelian terms. God's speaking is conceived in terms akin to cognition, with all modalities of interior speech tending to be reduced to propositions. The attribute of "perdurance" *(al-baqā')*, previously rejected by a number of Ash'arī masters, is considered simply as a negative concept ("perdures" = "does not cease to exist") by al-Ghazālī, who explicitly rejects the earlier conception of the ontological grounding of attributes.

Where the classical doctrine of the school had held that all beings other than God are corporeal, the Ash'arī theologians now recognize the existence of a host of "spirits" *(arwāḥ)* belonging to the "upper world" *(al-'ālam al-a'lā)*. The atomistic conception of material bodies continues to be stated in much the same terms as before, but on another level, living beings tend to be talked of not as mere composites of atoms and their discrete "accidents," but as beings having a real, essential unity. The conception of God as the sole cause of the existence of every contingent being is maintained, though now discussed and argued with somewhat different terminology, as is the thesis of the createdness of human actions, which continues to be set forth on the basis of the same set of distinctions as in the texts of the classical period. The occasionalistic language that characterizes classical Ash'arī writing is formally retained, but its radical tone is to some extent mitigated and the function of secondary causes plainly recognized.

The adoption of Aristotelian psychology is of signal importance. The changing perspective of the Ash'arī *kalām* is perhaps most conspicuously exemplified in al-Ghazālī's discussion of what is morally good and bad, right and wrong. The traditional Ash'arī conception of ethical valuations in terms of obligation based in God's unconditioned command, license, and prohibition he rationalizes through a sort of utilitarianism of virtue: one ought always to act for his own ultimate good (that is, that to be achieved in the next life), and this is uniquely made known in God's revelation. He accounts for good *(ḥasan)* and bad *(qabīḥ)* not directly in what is commanded and forbidden but, harmonizing Ṣūfī teaching with an Aristotelian notion of virtue, in terms of ends *(aghrāḍ)*, where moral perfection is measured by one's nearness to God.

If in their *kalām* works al-Ghazālī and al-Shahrastānī seem to have harmonized or juxtaposed disparate conceptual frameworks in a synthetic unity, this is not the case with al-Rāzī, who maintained a profound commitment to the Muslim philosophical tradition. He wrote extensively on philosophy (as well as on medicine and other sciences), and in his principal *kalām* works, *Ma'ālim uṣūl al-dīn* (The Landmarks of Fundamental Doctrine) and the much longer *Kitāb al-arba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn* (The Forty [Questions] concerning Fundamental Doctrine), as also in his monumental commentary on the Qur'ān, we find Ash'arī theology almost fully adapted to the conceptual universe of the philosophical tradition. Indeed, it seems possible that in some places al-Rāzī may follow his philosophical sources (chiefly Ibn Sīnā) so far as to compromise one or more of the fundamental theological tenets of the school. The number and diversity of his works are so great, however, that with the present state of our knowledge it is not possible to come to a firm assessment of his thought.

After al-Rāzī, Ash'arī theology is continued chiefly in a series of manuals eclectically dependent upon the great writers of the past. The most famous of these, *Al-mawāqif fī uṣūl al-dīn* (The Stages in Fundamental Doctrine) of 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1355), has continued to serve as a textbook on theology to the present day. Among the various commentaries written on it, the most important and widely used is that of al-Jurjānī (d. 1413), and together with this text the *Mawāqif* has gone through a large number of printed editions since the early nineteenth century.

Because of the differences in language and conceptualization between the Ash'arī theology of the classical period and that of later times, especially after al-Rāzī, it is impossible to define or characterize the tradition in terms of a single way of conceiving, formulating, and dealing with theological and metaphysical problems. The original success of Ash'arī theology stemmed from the kind of coherent balance it achieved between rational understanding and a religious sense that was rooted in a basically conservative reading of the Qur'ān and the *sunnah*. Its development followed the religious and intellectual evolution of Sunnī Islam. The unity of the school lies largely in its common adherence to a

basic set of theses, which sets it apart from other Muslim schools of speculative theology, such as the Māturīdīyah, on the one hand, and in its conceptual rationalization of these theses, which sets it apart from the more rigid traditionalists, on the other. Above all, it is the tradition's sense of its own continuity, beginning with the immediate disciples of al-Ash'arī, that allows it to be identified by itself and others as Ash'arī.

[*For further discussion of Ash'arī theology, see* Kalām *and the biographies of al-Ash'arī, al-Ghazālī, al-Ījī, Niẓām al-Mulk, al-Rāzī, and al-Shahrastānī. For discussion of related trends in Islamic theology, see* Mu'tazilah; Ḥanābilah; *and the biographies of Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf and al-Māturīdī.*]

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ASHERAH. *See* Athirat.

ASHER BEN YEḤI'EL (c. 1250–1327), known as Rabbenu ("our teacher") Asher or as R'oSH, the acronym of that epithet; Talmudist and rabbinic legal authority. Born and educated in Germany, Asher was the leading disciple of the outstanding German rabbinic scholar of his age, Me'ir ben Barukh of Rothenburg. The